



**FOREIGN COMMERCIAL SERVICE
INFORMATION PACKAGE**

A Global Perspective / A Global Career



Dear Prospective Applicant:

Thank you for your interest in the Commercial Service. Our agency employs United States citizens in a number of capacities. This information packet was prepared to assist U. S. citizens interested in becoming Career Candidate Commercial Service Officers to find information about the Commercial Service and Commercial Service Officer careers. This information packet is in no way exhaustive, and the information contained herein is subject to change without notice.

The Commercial Service offers an outstanding platform for personal and professional growth. As members of the United State's diplomatic corps, Commercial Service Officers commonly have access to persons and places that are beyond the reach of most of their peers. A career as a Commercial Service Officer also provides outstanding opportunities to learn new languages and travel internationally. A Commercial Service Officer career, however, is not for everyone. The demands on one's person and family should not be underestimated. Commercial Service Officers spend the majority of their careers overseas, far from home and often in challenging environments. Spouses and other accompanying dependents may find their careers disrupted. Therefore, the decision to become a Commercial Service Officer is one that should involve all of the members of your household.

I hope that I have piqued your interest. I encourage you to become familiar with our agency. For more information and updates on our latest developments, visit our website, www.export.gov/commercialservice/. Your application is most certainly welcome.



The Commercial Service

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The United States and Foreign Commercial Service (USFCS) is one of four Official Foreign Affairs Agencies under the Foreign Service Act of 1980. The other three official Foreign Affairs Agencies include the United States Department of State, the United States Agency for International Development, and the Foreign Agricultural Service. Each agency specializes in one or more functional areas of Foreign Affairs. The Commercial Service, as we are more commonly known, is responsible for ***Commercial Affairs***. The Commercial Service falls under the purview of the International Trade Administration (ITA) and is responsible for:

- The promotion of United States goods and services overseas
- The protection of United States commercial interests overseas

The mission of ITA is to promote and strengthen the international trade and investment position of the United States and world trade. The Commercial Service is one of four programmatic units within the International Trade Administration. The three other units within ITA are:

- Market Access and Compliance (MAC) - responsible for country and regional analysis of United States export markets. MAC also looks for exporting problems caused by foreign governments and uses every possible tool to achieve equal treatment for U.S. companies and workers.
- Manufacturing and Services (MAS) - undertakes industry trade analysis, shapes U.S. trade policy, participates in trade negotiations, organizes trade capacity building programs, and evaluates the impact of domestic and international economic and regulatory policies on U.S. manufacturers and service industries.
- Import Administration (IA) - investigates antidumping and countervailing duty claims and supports the Office of the United States Trade Representative.

Commercial Service Officers (also known as COs or FCSOs) are officers of the United States Government, appointed by the President with the advice and consent of the Senate to represent the Government of the United States to foreign sovereign states. Commercial Service Officers help United States businesses decide when, whether and where to begin exporting; develop export strategies; and locate export financing and business partners, such as agents, distributors, and joint venture partners. Commercial Service Officers articulate, develop and refine United States commercial policy; coordinate trade missions attended by corporate and government executives that expand United States export market share overseas; and cultivate personal and professional contacts to be used in influencing foreign trade regimes to benefit and defend United States commercial interests. Whether serving ***overseas or domestically***, Commercial

Service Officer assignments present the opportunity to use insights gained from personal and professional experience to make a difference in the world.

Serving a substantial portion of their careers at overseas diplomatic missions (usually in embassies, consulates or trade centers), Commercial Service Officers enjoy access to places and people beyond the experience of most United States Government employees. As an accredited United States diplomat, the Officer is regarded as an official representative of the United States by the accrediting country(ies), and carries the privileges and responsibilities associated with that representation at all times. While the demands on Officers' personal time are great, they are often offset by the opportunity to learn new languages, travel to diverse locations, live in new cultures, and expand professional competencies through first-hand experience in foreign markets.

The following information has been prepared to help you decide whether a Commercial Service Officer career is ***the right choice for you***. Please take the time to familiarize yourself with the challenges, obligations and responsibilities that exist in the Commercial Service. In the end, we hope you will agree that a career in the Commercial Service is well worth your time and energy.





Qualification Requirements

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Generally, all applicants must meet the following criteria:

1. Possess a BA or BS degree and have two years of specialized experience. Specialized experience is described as experience performing the following duties:

- ❑ Assisting with the production of regional and/or international market analyses that are accepted as accurate and authoritative, and that form the basis of business-related decisions.
- ❑ Assisting with the development or implementation of an international trade and marketing strategy for a U.S. product or service which includes identifying target foreign markets, analyzing the potential of these new markets, developing a business plan to successfully establish business operations and promoting the product or service domestically or internationally.
- ❑ Assisting in the planning and implementation of trade promotion events such as trade fairs or trade missions.
- ❑ Actively participating in contacts with foreign governments or other organizations to influence the outcome of business activities between U.S. companies and foreign markets.
- ❑ Contributing to the analysis of commercial issues requiring trade, economic, or business knowledge of one or more geographic or political regions.

OR

2. Possess a MA or MS Degree or other graduate degree and one year of specialized experience as described above.

3. Applicant must also:

- ❑ Be a U.S. Citizen.
- ❑ Be between the ages of 21 and 59 – The Foreign Service has a mandatory retirement age of 65. To retire under a Foreign Service retirement system, one must have at least five years of service credit under the system.
- ❑ Be available for a worldwide assignment and be willing to relocate approximately every 3-4 years.

How do I apply?

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1. Complete the online application.

Applicants must pass the initial online application screening process before receiving an invitation for the one-day oral assessment. A link to the application is placed on the employment page of the www.export.gov/commercialservice/ website approximately three to four months prior to the Assessment. The vacancy announcement is also available at www.usajobs.opm.gov (go to the Department of Commerce, International Trade Administration listings), and www.jobs.doc.gov (go to the International Trade Administration or Foreign Commercial Service listings). Please note that you cannot access the vacancy announcement until it is officially posted on the website. The Foreign Commercial Service offers the Assessment Center exam once every two years.

2. What is an Assessment Center?

In general, the term "Assessment Center" refers to the process for administering a series of exercises to determine if applicants have the skills and abilities to serve successfully as a Commercial Service Officer. The Commercial Service Assessment Center is a daylong examination process, which allows prospective Foreign Commercial Service Officers to demonstrate their oral and written communication skills, negotiating ability, and management and administrative abilities. The Commercial Service assumes that candidates have an understanding of export promotion programs, including the roles of public and private sector agencies and organizations, and the dynamics and techniques of export promotion for purposes of the assessment.

The exam consists of a number of exercises that may include any or all of the following: hypothetical exercises, writing exercises, in-box tests, leaderless group exercises and an interview. The Foreign Service Act of 1980 stipulates that entry to the Foreign Service will occur through an "impartial and rigorous examination." The Commercial Service Assessment Center is designed to serve this purpose.

3. I applied and passed the Pre-Screen Exam...what's next?

All applications are reviewed and rated and the eligible candidates that meet the criteria for trade related education and experience are invited to attend the Commercial Service Assessment. The highest-ranking candidates who pass the Assessment are placed on a list called the Rank Order Register.

At this stage in the application process, candidates have the option of providing proof of proficiency in one language. Although language ability is not a requirement for entry into the Foreign Commercial Service, candidates who opt to take a foreign language test will receive additional points when the Rank Order Register is finalized. Information regarding language testing is distributed to candidates on the day of the Assessment.

The Foreign Commercial Service confers conditional offers of employment from the Rank Order Register, from the highest scorer to the lowest. The Register is valid for a maximum of twenty-four months from the date certified by the Director General (the highest ranking official in the Foreign Commercial Service). The candidates who do not receive a conditional offer before the Rank Order Register expires may reapply for the next Assessment exam.



Commercial Service Assessment Exam

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The Commercial Service Assessment is the vehicle used to recruit candidates into the Foreign Commercial Service. Candidates who pass the initial online application screening process are invited to participate in the Commercial Service Assessment. This phase of the application process includes one day of testing in the Washington, DC area at the candidate's expense.

Performance Dimensions:

The Assessment is designed to test for behaviors, which demonstrate whether candidates possess specific skills needed to successfully perform the job of a Commercial Service Officer. The skills tested in this Assessment were determined after conducting a thorough job analysis.

Specifically, these skills and their definitions are:

Written and Oral Communication Skills

- **Reading:** Skill in understanding and using written information that may be presented in a variety of formats, such as text, tables, lists, figures, and diagrams; selecting reading strategies appropriate to the purpose, such as skimming for highlights, reading for details, reading for meaning, and critical analysis.
- **Writing:** Skill in expressing ideas and information in written form clearly, succinctly, accurately, and in an organized manner; using English language conventions of spelling, punctuation, grammar, and sentence and paragraph structure; tailoring written communication to the intended purpose and audience.
 - Knowledge of correct grammar, organization, diction, spelling, and punctuation required for written reports and for editing the written work of others in order to produce high quality reports.
- **Speaking:** Skill in expressing ideas and facts orally in a clear and understandable manner that sustains listener attention and interest; tailoring oral communication to the intended purpose and audience.
- **Listening:** Skill in attending to, receiving, and correctly interpreting verbal communications and directions through cues such as the content and context of the message and the tone, gestures, and facial expressions of the speaker.

Problem Solving and Decision Making Skills

- **Gathering and analyzing information:** Skill in obtaining facts, information, or data relevant to a particular problem, question, or issue through observation of events or situations, discussion with others, research, or retrieval from written or electronic sources; organizing, integrating, analyzing, and evaluating information.

- Analyzing and solving problems: Skill in anticipating or identifying problems and their causes; developing and analyzing potential solutions or improvements using rational and logical processes or innovative and creative approaches when needed.
- Calculating budget and other numbers: Skill in applying mathematics and budgetary concepts to office and program budgets; ability to calculate landed cost of goods.
- Making decisions and judgments: Skill in making decisions that take into consideration relevant facts and information, potential risks and benefits, and short- and long-term consequences or alternatives.
- Organizing and planning: Skill in organizing and structuring work for effective performance and goal attainment; setting and balancing priorities; anticipating obstacles; formulating plans consistent with available human, financial, and physical resources; modifying plans or adjusting priorities given changing goals or conditions.

Skills in Achieving Results

- Customer service: Skill in improving processes/products/services, seeking feedback, and responding in a timely manner in order to better address customer needs; understanding and using suitable styles of communication (e.g., formal versus informal, concise versus detailed, written versus oral) to fit the audience and purpose.
- Salesmanship: Skill in generating enthusiasm in others for products and services and being comfortable asking others for things in order to broaden customer and service base.
- Interpreting authority relationships: Skill in understanding the effective range and use of one's own authority in order to achieve results within a bureaucratic and/or political context.
- Furthering diversity: Skill in understanding and applying the principles of fair treatment and equal opportunity in contributing to the Department's goals and objectives.
- Objectivity: Skill in identifying and separating personal bias from facts and citing pros and cons frankly and fully in order to allow clients to make well-reasoned and accurate decisions.

Skill in Working With and Leading Others

- Adaptability: Skill in changing one's own behavior or work methods to adjust to other people or to changing situations or work demands; being receptive to new information, ideas, or strategies to achieve goals.
- Working in teams: Skill in working cooperatively and collaboratively with others to achieve goals by sharing or integrating ideas, knowledge, skills, information, support, resources, responsibility, and recognition.
- Leading others: Skill in motivating, inspiring, and influencing others toward effective individual or team performance, goal attainments, and personal learning and development by serving as a mentor, coach, and role model and by providing feedback and recognition or rewards.
- Building Consensus / Negotiation / Persuasion: Skill in building consensus among individuals or groups by facilitating agreements that involve sharing or exchanging resources or resolving differences in such a way as to promote mutual goals and

interests; by persuading others to change their point of view or behavior without losing their future support; and by resolving conflicts, confrontations, and disagreements while maintaining productive working relationships.

- Professionalism: Skill in maintaining self-confidence, determination, and enthusiasm despite setbacks or emotionally tense situations in order to solve problems or challenges.

Cultural Skills

- Using social skills: Skill in interacting with others in ways that are friendly, courteous, and tactful and that demonstrate respect for individual and cultural differences and for the attitudes and feelings of others.
- Cultural sensitivity: Skill in understanding the values and customs of other cultures in order to interact effectively (e.g., build rapport, maintain and manage relationships) with foreign businesses and governments.
- Language: Skill in using precise language and conveying nuances of meaning in order to interact with foreign and domestic governments and businesses, and CS officers and FSNs.

Personal and Professional Growth Skills

Self and career development: Skill in identifying own work and career interests, strengths, and limitations; pursuing education, training, feedback, or other opportunities for learning and development; managing, directing, and monitoring one's own learning and development.

Oral Assessment:

As this Assessment tests for skills and abilities, rather than knowledge, there is little to do to prepare except to review the skills you will be measured on, get a good's night rest, and relax. The test has been prepared for candidates who all have a minimum of two years working experience (or a master's degree and one year experience) specific to international trade, business, government, or related areas, and candidates will be expected to generally draw from this experience. Candidates may wish to familiarize themselves with the mission of the U.S. Commercial Service by reviewing our web page at http://www.export.gov/comm_svc.

The Assessment will consist of five exercises. The five exercises are:

--Structured Interview: This is done through two distinct interviews. The hypothetical interview presents candidates with job related situations similar to those they would likely encounter in the FCS and asks them to describe how they would resolve the problem presented. The Past Behavior Interview asks candidates to describe how they performed in specific situations in their experience that are similar to situations they could expect to encounter in the FCS.

--Group Exercise: This exercise is a leaderless group discussion in which candidates work in a group of up to six candidates to solve a realistic work-related problem. Each candidate prepares and gives a brief presentation on their assigned role to their peers, and then the entire group debates the various positions and comes to a decision.

--Advocacy Exercise: The candidates play the role of Foreign Commercial Service Officers (FCSO) advocating on behalf of a U.S. company. They prepare and give a brief presentation, respond to questions on their presentation, and then compose a memo that summarizes the presentation and offers suggestions for next steps.

--In-box Exercise: This exercise is a "speeded" Assessment. Candidates decide which emails to delegate and to whom, and then they were required to put the remaining e-mails in order of priority.

--Editing Exercise: This exercise requires candidates to perform the common FCSO task of editing reports created by host country employees for whom English is not their native language.



Foreign Commercial Service Officer

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Commercial Service Officers (Commercial Officers) serving overseas provide in-country leadership for United States export promotion programs, designed in partnership with other agencies and organizations, to capitalize on existing market potential and create new opportunities. Commercial Officers advocate and intercede with local governments and trade organizations on behalf of United States companies, and develop and utilize an extensive network of host country contacts at the local, regional, and national levels. The Commercial Section at a United States diplomatic mission hosts Congressional, state and local government delegations, as directed by the Ambassador, and coordinates trade delegations led by senior Administration officials. Commercial Officers lead the implementation of Trade Promotion Coordinating Committee country / regional initiatives, support policy negotiations, resolve trade complaints, and implement comprehensive country export promotion programs.

There are about 250 Commercial Service Officers serving in 107 U.S. Export Assistance Centers throughout the country, and more than 150 offices in 89 countries – usually in locations with the most promising market potential for United States goods and services. Over the course of a 20-year career, the typical Officer can expect to serve in at least five overseas and / or domestic assignments.

The Senior Commercial Officer (SCO) oversees the Commercial Section of an overseas diplomatic mission, including a staff of Commercial Service Officers; local citizen staff, called Foreign Service Nationals (FSNs); and any United States or third-country national local hires. Commercial Sections may range in size from one or two Officers with only a few FSNs, to large posts with 10 or 12 Officers and 40 or more FSNs. In addition to planning and administering programs and budgets, managing FSNs as we communicate across language and cultural barriers is part of every Commercial Officer's job.

Generally, the SCO reports directly to the Ambassador and is part of the Ambassador's Country Team. Under the general direction of the Ambassador, the SCO and the Commercial Section of the Mission focus on commercial and trade issues. The SCO is the Ambassador's principal advisor on commercial issues and typically takes the lead in formulating the post's Strategic Commercial Plan. The staff of the Commercial Section works closely with staff from other agencies at the Mission on issues that cut across agency lines (e.g. the United States Department of State, the United States Department of Agriculture, and the United States Department of Defense).

... and Other Duties as Assigned

In addition to the duties performed during normal office hours, Commercial Officers serving overseas have **representational responsibilities** that must be fulfilled during the evenings or on the weekends. These responsibilities may include hosting social events at

home or attending receptions several times per week in an effort to build professional ties with local officials and business representatives.

The Commercial Officer, like all other Officers at the Mission, must also take his or her turn serving as ***Duty Officer***. The Duty Officer is on call evenings, weekends and holidays, for a week at a time, to handle emergencies. Examples of emergencies include receiving a call from the lawyer of a jailed United States national at 2:00 a.m. demanding immediate assistance from the Embassy, or checking incoming cables on New Year's Day to determine if any urgent issues should be brought to the Ambassador's attention. Officers at a smaller post usually serve as Duty Officer more often.

During emergencies, the Ambassador has the authority to deploy staff as he or she sees fit, regardless of the Department to which the staff member belongs. Consequently, a Commercial Officer might find him or herself running the Embassy's motor pool or serving as a Site Officer, organizing and managing logistics for meetings during a Presidential visit. If the host country is undergoing a period of civil disturbance, a Commercial Officer may assist in evacuating United States nationals from the area.



Promoting Diversity

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The Commercial Service recognizes the value of a diverse workforce and actively seeks to promote diversity. Our diversity is part of what makes us unique, as individuals and as a nation. Aspects of our diversity contribute to our personal identities and allow us to approach problems from different perspectives. Promoting diversity means creating a workplace that is inclusive and permits our organization to benefit from new ideas and innovations.

Through a series of innovative strategies, the Commercial Service taps the wealth of human resource available in the United States' many communities. ***The Ronald H. Brown Commercial Service Fellowship Program*** was inaugurated in 1995 to increase the number of persons from under-represented populations serving in the Commercial Service. Participating Fellows conduct graduate study at major institutions of higher learning, and gain professional experience in our Commercial Service domestic field offices. The Commercial Service also actively participates in the ***United States Department of Commerce Diversity Working Group***, an organization that pools the resources of each of the Department's bureaus to educate the public and recruit from among various under-represented populations. Both, in cooperation with the Working Group and separate from it, the Commercial Service has recruited at ***professional conferences***, including the National Urban League, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Asian Pacific American Foreign Affairs Council, the President's Committee on the Employment of People with Disabilities (job fair), and the League of Latin American Citizens, to name only a few. The Commercial Service also conducts ***targeted recruitment*** at Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Hispanic Serving Institutions, and Tribally Controlled Colleges and Universities.

The Commercial Service also promotes diversity in its programs. Among those programs specially targeted toward under-represented populations, the ***Global Diversity Initiative*** provides support to minority-owned, new-to-export companies; export marketing training, consulting and support to new-to-export firms; and participation in global trade events. The ***Rural Export Initiative*** utilizes new technology to bring export opportunities to companies in rural areas of the United States; creates local supportive partner networks; and ensures better access to export assistance programs for rural companies. The ***Women's Initiative*** increases market access to women-owned Small- and Medium-sized Enterprises; offers consulting services; and facilitates partner contacts for women-owned firms.

In the belief that diversity is one of our national assets, the Commercial Service has been both, proactive and innovative in its recruitment, employment and programmatic efforts. It is our goal as an organization to ensure that the Commercial Service represents the many faces of the United States in all of its endeavors.



Assignments and Tours of Duty

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The Assignments Panel is a body comprised of members from within the International Trade Administration that determines all Commercial Service Officer assignments. Decisions of the Assignments Panel take account of such factors as transfer eligibility; personal rank; performance; language proficiency; requirements pertaining to hardship and domestic tours; requirements for substantial overseas service; and the expressed interest of the employee, including considerations of career and professional development. Career (tenured) and Career Candidate (tenure-track) Commercial Service Officers formally express their preferences in the form of a “bid list”. However, the needs of the Service come first; and the Commercial Service reserves the right to direct assign an Officer to any available position.

All Rank Order Register Candidates are direct assigned to positions for their first tours of duty. The Rank Order Register is a list of persons who have passed the Commercial Service Assessment, but have not yet been hired as Career Candidate Commercial Service Officers. Rank Order Register Candidates must receive and accept an assignment, pass security and medical clearances, and successfully complete a drug screen to be sworn-in and officially converted to the status of Career Candidate. Once hired and converted to the status of Career Candidate (tenure-track) Commercial Service Officer, new Officers are invited to participate in the bidding process. However, Rank Order Register Candidates cannot bid.

To determine a Rank Order Register Candidate’s assignment, the Assignments Officer reviews position and staffing requirements, and solicits information from candidates pertaining to regional preferences and language abilities. Based on the information provided by candidates, the Assignments Officer attempts to find suitable matches, and makes recommendations to the Assignments Panel. All candidates for assignment must be worldwide available, regardless of their personal preferences; and Rank Order Register Candidates who decline their assignments will not receive further consideration by the Assignments Panel. (Candidates who decline their assignments are welcome to re-apply to sit for future administrations of the Commercial Service Assessment and attempt to qualify for inclusion on a new Rank Order Register.)

The ***standard tour of duty*** for each post is set by the Director General, and varies from four years for non-hardship posts, to one, two to three years for posts in “hardship” locations. Regardless of the standard tour of duty for a post, all first-tour Commercial Service Officers are assigned two-year tours of duty. ***New Career Candidate Commercial Service Officers are expected to begin a tour of duty at an Export Assistance Center within the United States sometime during their first seven years of service.*** Officers may bid to extend their tours of duty in one-year increments; however, the maximum continuous stay at a foreign post (or in a country) is five years.



Tenure Requirements for Career Candidates

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Career Candidate Commercial Service Officers are permitted a maximum of five years to be converted to Career status, or “tenured”. Career Candidates are expected to demonstrate professional competence, attested to in their performance evaluations, and proficiency in at least one foreign language. The recommendation to convert a Career Candidate to Career status is made by the ***Commissioning and Tenure Board***. Tenured Commercial Service Officers are called “Career Commercial Service Officers”. Failure to be converted to Career status by the expiration of the fifth year of continuous service as a Career Candidate will result in separation from the Service.

Advancement as a Commercial Service Officer is entirely dependent upon an Officer’s skills and aspirations. Commercial Service Officers are eligible to enter the ranks of the Senior Foreign Service and the Ambassadorial Class. Promotions are merit-based and do not take account of length of service. Once converted to Career status (“tenured”), the ***“up or out”*** nature of the Service forces Commercial Service Officers to continually demonstrate superior performance or risk being separated from the Service. The intent of this policy is to ensure the progressive advancement of highly skilled and talented employees through the ranks of the organization, and retain the expertise and experience of our most capable officers.



A New Lifestyle

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... Housing

When a Commercial Service Officer arrives at an overseas post, he or she will be met by a “sponsor”, who introduces the Officer to mission personnel and provides assistance with shopping, schools, household help, etc. for the first few weeks of the assignment.

Commercial Service Officers serving overseas are provided United States Government-owned or leased quarters, or are given a living quarters allowance which covers rent and utilities at a given duty station. Some quarters are unfurnished, except for major appliances, such as stoves, refrigerators, freezers, washer machines and dryers. Travel orders, therefore, usually allow for a full shipment of household effects (up to 18,000 lbs.). Effects not shipped may be stored at United States Government expense. The total weight of shipped and stored effects may not exceed 18,000 lbs. At many duty stations, basic furniture is provided. In this case, a limited shipment of household effects is authorized (7,200 lbs.). The United States Government does not provide housing, nor does it defray the cost of housing, for Commercial Service Officers serving within the United States or its territories.

Housing varies by post. In some developed countries, it is of high quality, though it can be small by United States standards. In less developed countries, quarters are usually very comfortable by local standards, but may not equal United States standards.

... Vehicles

Vehicles that meet local import and licensing requirements may be included in an Officer’s authorized shipment. Vehicles that do not meet local standards may still be imported (depending on the post to which an Officer is assigned); however, their use in country may require the owner to make significant alterations to the vehicle to comply with local standards.

Arrangements may also be made to ship newly purchased vehicles that meet local standards directly to post from the manufacturer; or vehicles may be purchased on the local market. A market for vehicles often exists within the diplomatic community among Officers who are leaving post and those who have recently arrived. There are significant restrictions that vary by country pertaining to the sale by diplomats of vehicles outside the diplomatic community.

... Allowances and Differentials

A cost of living allowance is provided when the cost of living differential between a post and Washington, DC is significant. Post differential is a fixed percentage of an Officer’s base salary, ranging from five to twenty-five percent that is intended to compensate

Officers for service in locations with difficult living conditions. Only a few of the CS positions have danger pay, another allowance that compensates Officers for service in locations that present significant security risks. Education allowances will be discussed, below, under “Schools and Education Allowances”. One or more of the above allowances may apply depending upon the duty station where an Officer is assigned.

... Accompanying Dependents

Legal dependents planning to accompany an Officer to post must pass a physical examination and obtain a “medical clearance”. In rare cases, dependents may not be allowed to accompany the Officer because of dangerous conditions at post, or for reasons related to the results of the medical clearance conducted on the dependent in question. In cases where a dependent cannot or does not wish to accompany the Officer to post, a *separate maintenance allowance* may be available.

Many training and orientation resources are available to Officers’ legal dependents through the United States Department of State Overseas Briefing Center (OBC) (<http://www.state.gov/m/fsi/tc/c6954.htm>) and Family Liaison Office (FLO) (<http://www.state.gov/m/dghr/flo/>). Please check the FLO website for information related to family support services, family member employment, and community liaison services.

... Employment Opportunities for Spouses and Accompanying Dependents

The United States has Bilateral Work Agreements or de facto reciprocal work arrangements with some of the countries staffed by Commercial Service Officers. Bilateral Work Agreements may enable dependents of United States Government employees assigned to official duties at United States diplomatic missions to seek employment on the local labor market. In the case of de facto reciprocal work arrangements, dependents may apply through specified channels for a permit to work in the local economy.

United States diplomatic missions make an effort to hire the dependents of Officers stationed there to fill primarily administrative or consular positions at post; however, vacancies are usually limited in number. It is important to note that it is often difficult for the spouses of Commercial Service Officers to find gainful employment on the local labor market in most foreign countries. Commercial Service Officers and their dependents may make use of the resources of the United States Department of State Overseas Briefing Center (OBC) and the Family Liaison Office (FLO) to learn more about overseas employment opportunities for spouses and accompanying dependents.

... Schools and Education Allowances

While Officers serve overseas, the full cost of tuition at a United States Government-sponsored school at post is provided for all dependents from Kindergarten through Grade 12. If there are no United States Government-sponsored schools at an Officer’s post of assignment, the Commercial Service offers an *education allowance* to defray the cost of

tuition, room and board, and periodic transportation between post and the nearest locality where an adequate school is available.

United States Government-sponsored schools include those founded by United States companies, church organizations, and individual proprietors. Most are nonprofit, nondenominational, independent schools, established on a cooperative basis by United States citizens residing in foreign communities. These schools receive assistance and support from the United States Government under a program administered by the Office of Overseas Schools at the United States Department of State. The purpose of this assistance is to help schools provide adequate educational opportunities for the dependents of United States Government employees and to demonstrate to foreign nationals the philosophy and methods of American education. Many of these “accredited” schools are open to nationals of all countries although their teaching staffs are predominantly American.

These schools range from tiny schools with only a few elementary school pupils to large schools of over 1,000 students, providing education through high school. Instructional programs provide a core curriculum that prepares students to enter schools, colleges and universities in the United States. The language of instruction is English, supplemented at most schools with instruction in the local language. The content of the curriculum is American, but may vary, depending on the proportion of United States nationals in the student population. The curricula tend to be largely academic and the quality of instruction ranges from good to excellent at most schools. Further information about overseas educational opportunities can be found at <http://www.state.gov/m/a/os/>.



Employee Benefits for Commercial Officers

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The Commercial Service offers a competitive employee benefits package for Commercial Service Officers. Covered benefits include the following.

... Retirement

Commercial Service employees, appointed as Career (tenure) or Career Candidate (tenure-track) Commercial Service Officers, are subject to the Foreign Service Retirement and Disability System (FSRDS) or Foreign Service Pension System (FSPS), depending on the individual's Federal employment history. There is a mandatory retirement age of 65 under the Foreign Service Retirement System. (The minimum retirement age is 50 with 20 years of creditable service, five years of which must have been covered by the Foreign Service Retirement System.)

... Leave

Sick leave is accrued at a rate of four hours per pay period for a total of thirteen days per year by all Commercial Service Officers, regardless of the number of years of service.

Annual leave is earned at a rate of four, six, or eight hours per pay period, depending on the length of service.

- 4 hours per pay period or 13 days per leave year for less than 30 days per year
- 6 hours per pay period or 20 days per leave year after 3 years of federal service but less than 15 years
- 8 hours per pay period or 26 days per leave year after 15 years of federal service

In addition to annual leave, **home leave** is accumulated at a rate of fifteen working days for each year of overseas service. A minimum of eighteen months of continuous service abroad is required for home leave eligibility, and Officers must take home leave after three years of continuous service overseas. Under home leave, the United States Government pays roundtrip travel expenses for the employee and eligible dependents to the employee's designated home leave address in the United States.

... Other Benefits

Thrift Savings Plan (equivalent to 401(k) with Government matching)

Foreign Service Officers may participate in this long-term savings, retirement, and investment program for federal employees. Additional information is available at www.tsp.gov.

Life Insurance

Foreign Commercial Service Officers are eligible to participate in the Federal Employees Group Life Insurance (FEGLI) Plan. This plan offers low rates that are made through payroll deductions. The U.S. Government pays one-third of the cost for this insurance. This plan is voluntary and is intended as a form of immediate group term life insurance. The Office of Federal Employees' Group Life Insurance (OFEGLI), which is a private entity that has a contract with the Federal Government, processes and pays claims under the FEGLI Program. Additional information is available at <http://www.opm.gov/insure/life/>

Family Medical Leave

The Family Medical leave Act (FMLA) of 1993 provides Federal employees with up to 12 workweeks of unpaid, job-protected leave for the following reasons:

- Birth of a child
- Adoption of a child
- Serious illness of an employee
- Care of a seriously ill child, spouse or parent

Ten Paid Holidays Per Year

- New Year's Day
- Martin Luther King's Birthday
- President's Day
- Memorial Day
- Independence Day
- Labor Day
- Columbus Day
- Veteran's Day
- Thanksgiving Day
- Christmas Day

NOTE: The U.S. Government also observes some local holidays celebrated at overseas posts of assignment.



Pay Schedule

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The Foreign Commercial Service recruits at the FS-04/FS-05 entry level. This Foreign Service pay grade is equivalent to the civil service grades of GS-12 and GS-11 respectively. The Commercial Service bases an officer's personal grade on the number of years of directly relevant, paid experience an applicant possesses, and the number of years an applicant has been paid a given salary level in a position where the responsibilities approximate those of a Commercial Officer. The more experience an applicant possesses prior to joining the Foreign Commercial Service, the higher his/her personal grade and/or step.

Once grade and step are determined based on education and experience documented during the application process, the candidate's current salary is examined to determine if he or she will lose money by joining the Foreign Commercial Service. Every attempt is made to match the candidate's current salary to the FCS starting salary. Salary tables for the current year are available at <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/30701.pdf>.



Frequently asked Questions and Answers

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Q. Are you a part of the Department of State?

- A. The Commercial Service is a branch of the International Trade Administration within the United States Department of Commerce. There are three other branches of the International Trade Administration:
- Market Access and Compliance (MAC) is responsible for country and regional analysis of United States export markets. MAC also looks for exporting problems caused by foreign governments and uses every possible tool to achieve equal treatment for U.S. companies and workers.
 - Manufacturing and Services (MAS) undertakes industry trade analysis, shapes U.S. trade policy, participates in trade negotiations, organizes trade capacity building programs, and evaluates the impact of domestic and international economic and regulatory policies on U.S. manufacturers and service industries.
 - Import Administration (IA) investigates antidumping and countervailing duty claims and supports the Office of the United States Trade Representative.

While independent from the Department of State, the United States and Foreign Commercial Service works very closely with them. The State Department takes the lead in all matters related to foreign affairs.

Q. What is a Limited non-career candidate?

- A. Limited Non-career Foreign Service Officers ("Limiteds") are members of the public, hired as Foreign Commercial Service Officers for specific duty stations and tours of duty based on specialized skill or experience that they possess. Limited Non-career Foreign Service Officers' first tours of duty are limited to two years. There is no promise, implicit or explicit, of onward assignment or other further employment with the Commercial Service at the termination of the initial two-year tour of duty, any extension(s), or subsequent Limited Non-career appointment(s). Limiteds cannot serve with the Commercial Service more than five consecutive years.

Q. How does age affect your ability to become a Career Candidate Commercial Service Officer (tenure-track)?

- A. The Foreign Service Act of 1980 requires that Career and Career Candidate Commercial Service Officers be retired at the end of the month during which the officer reaches the age of 65. To retire under the Foreign Service Retirement System, one must have vested at least five years of service in the System. To ensure full retirement benefits to our Career and Career Candidate Officer Corps, the

Commercial Service deems all persons over the age of 59 ineligible for appointment as Career Candidate Commercial Service Officers.

Q. What if I do not possess the minimum required directly relevant, professional experience?

- A. Whether applying to sit for the Commercial Service Assessment (to become a Career Candidate, tenure track Foreign Service Officer) or whether you are applying to become a Limited Non-career Candidate (non-tenure track), you will need to meet the minimum requirements to serve as a Commercial Officer in the Foreign Commercial Service. (Please review the section on qualification requirements for details.)

Q. How do health or medical conditions affect your ability to become a Career Candidate Commercial Service Officer (tenure-track)?

- A. All applicants and their accompanying dependents are required to submit to a medical examination to determine fitness for service as a Commercial Service Officer. Applicants are also required to pass a drug screen.

The purpose of the examination is to determine whether the applicant and his or her accompanying dependents are free of medical conditions, which require specialized evaluation and / or medical care, or which would be aggravated by environmental factors at certain overseas locations.

On a case-by-case basis, the Commercial Service may grant an administrative waiver of pre-employment medical standards. The well being of the applicant and accompanying dependents, cost to the United States Government, and the best interests of the Service are taken into account when determining whether to grant an administrative waiver. If granted, the applicant and / or accompanying dependent(s) receives a limited medical clearance for overseas assignment. Under no circumstance will the drug screen be waived, nor will an applicant who has failed a drug screen be hired.

Q. What happens to my Civil Service retirement benefits when I become a Career Candidate Commercial Service Officer (tenure-track)?

- A. Civil Servants who become Commercial Service Officers will have their retirement systems converted, as follows:

From... (Civil Service)
CSRS (Code 1)
CSRS OFFSET (Code C)
FERS (Code K)

To... (Foreign Service)
FSRDS (Code 3)
FSRDS OFFSET (Code G)
FSPS (Code P)

Retirement deductions would automatically be transferred from the Civil Service Retirement Fund to the Foreign Service Retirement and Disability Fund, or from the Federal Employees Retirement System to the Foreign Service Pension System.

Payroll Deductions for Retirement:

FSRDS: 7.0% of base pay
FSRDS OFFSET: 7.0% of base pay
FSPS: 1.7% of base pay

Retirement Eligibility (Voluntary Retirement):

FSRDS: Age 50 with 20 years of service
FSPS: Age 50 with 20 years of service (1.7% annuity)
Age 50 with 10 years of service (1.0% annuity)

Retirement Eligibility (Mandatory Retirement):

FSRDS and FSPS: Age 65 with 5 years of service

Basic Annuity:

FSRDS & FSRDS OFFSET: 2.0% of the average high three salaries for each year of service, including sick leave.
FSPS: 1.7% of the average high-three salaries. (Without the FSRDS component to the annuity)

Q. From the date of assignment, how long does it take to complete my clearances, take my oath-of-office, and arrive at my assigned duty station?

- A. Once the Rank Order Register is finalized; the Assignments Officer examines position requirements and identifies prospective vacancies that may be filled with candidates off the Rank Order Register.

Candidates are assigned off the Rank Order Register in the order that they appear on the list, beginning with the person with the highest score. The Rank Order Register is valid for a period of two years from the date it is accepted by the Assistant Secretary and Director General of the United States and Foreign Commercial Service. There is no guarantee of assignment off the Rank Order Register.

The assigned Rank Order Register Candidate receives a conditional offer of employment and has to either accept or decline the offer. Should the candidate accept the offer, the Commercial Service initiates security and medical clearances (it is incumbent upon the candidate to truthfully complete and sign all paperwork in a timely manner). To have a conditional offer of employment confirmed, the Candidate must have been granted both, a Top Secret security and medical clearance, and pass a drug screen. All together, the clearance process can take six or more months to complete, depending upon the candidate's experience and travel history, during which time the Rank Order Register Candidate remains outside the employ of the Commercial Service.

Once all clearances have been granted, an entry-on-duty (EOD) date will be determined based on the availability of training and the candidate's Expected Time of Arrival (ETA) at post. Entry-on-duty reflects the fact that the candidate has had a Standard Form 52 processed in his / her name, reflecting a confirmed appointment. The Standard Form 52 (Request for Personnel Action) is the document used to request personnel and/or position actions. Rank Order Register Candidates become formally employed by the Commercial Service as Career Candidate Commercial Service Officers (tenure-track) when they enter-on-duty. New Career Candidate Commercial Service Officers take an oath and sign appointment affidavits at Commercial Service headquarters in Washington, DC. This is referred to as the Commissioning Process.

Once on board, Career Candidates draw salaries from the Commercial Service. However, when applicable, their arrival at post may be delayed until they either receive the requisite language proficiency score or receive an administrative language proficiency waiver from the Assistant Secretary and Director General of the United States and Foreign Commercial Service. Language training may take from a few weeks to one year to complete. New Career Candidates will also be required to attend other training, including Equal Employment Opportunity, Diversity Training, Conflict Resolution, and Security Overseas, among other topics. Consultations with relevant personnel within the International Trade Administration and at other agencies may also be required as a means of formal introduction.

Q. What happens if I decline my conditional offer of employment as a Career Candidate Commercial Service Officer (tenure-track)?

- A. Rank Order Register Candidates who decline their conditional offers of employment are removed from further consideration off the relevant Rank Order Register. A candidate may defer an offer of employment for professional or personal reasons. At this point, the candidate must work with the Career Development and Assignments staff to make appropriate arrangements as to when they are ready to accept. To receive further consideration, candidates who decline their conditional offers of employment are required to pass the next administered Commercial Service Assessment and wait their turn on the resulting Rank Order Register.

All Career and Career Candidate Commercial Service Officers are required to be available for worldwide assignment. When you decline your assignment, you are indicating that you cannot meet this requirement. Furthermore, your assignment is an offer of employment, conditioned upon the successful completion of a Top Secret security and medical clearance and a drug screen. By declining your assignment, you are declining an offer of employment.

Q. Do I have to take an exam?

- A. To become a Career Candidate Foreign Service Officer within the Commercial Service (tenure-track), applicants must submit to a specialized version of the Foreign Service Exam called the Commercial Service Assessment. The Commercial Service Assessment is a competitive, daylong examination that consists of a number of exercises. Exercises may include any or all of the following: Situational interviews, Advocacy exercises, Editing exercises, in-box exercises and Leaderless Group Exercises.

Those who pass the Assessment are placed on a list called the Rank Order Register. Conditional offers of employment are made from the Rank Order Register, from the highest scorer to the lowest scorer on the list. The register is valid for a maximum of 24 months from the date certified by the Director General, Foreign Commercial Service.

A second class of Foreign Service Officer, the Limited Non-career Candidate, may be extended a conditional offer of employment without submitting to the Commercial Service Assessment. However, Limited Non-career Candidates will **not** be converted to Career Candidate status and placed before the Commissioning and Tenure Board without passing the Commercial Service Assessment. The maximum amount of time one can remain a Limited Non-career Candidate is five years, after which time the employee is separated from the Service.

To become a Civil Servant within a domestic field office or at our Washington Headquarters, please see the Department of Commerce Automated Commerce Employment System (ACES) for current vacancy announcements www.jobs.doc.gov/quickhire.html. Vacancy announcements are also posted on the Office of Personnel Management web site, under job series 1140, www.usajobs.opm.gov.

Q. What kind of training does the Commercial Service provide Foreign Service Officers?

- A. There are certain core training requirements that the Commercial Service provides to all classes of Foreign Service Officer: Career, Limited Career Candidate, and Limited Non-career Candidate. Core training consists of Equal Employment Opportunity, Diversity, Conflict Resolution, Performance Management, and Security Overseas. Career and Career Candidate Foreign Service Officers are also eligible for language and area studies courses offered by the National Foreign Affairs Training Center.

The Commercial Service established the CS College, which is an Intranet-based on-line career development tool offering a wide range of professional skills management courses. This training complements other in-class training.

Q. What if I don't qualify to take the Commercial Service Assessment / for a Limited Non-career Appointment?

- A. Qualification requirements vary from year to year. Please see the relevant portions of this document for current qualification criteria. For those who feel that they may not currently meet the minimum qualification criteria for a Foreign Service career with the Commercial Service, please realize that directly relevant experience can still be gained. Alternate career paths that offer directly relevant experience include:
- ❑ International Trade Specialist positions with the Government of the United States (job series 1140).
 - ❑ Export promotion positions with the export promotion offices of your state government with substantive export promotion responsibilities.
 - ❑ Program Analyst positions with the Government of the United States with substantive export promotion responsibilities (job series 0343).
 - ❑ Economist positions with substantive United States export market research and analysis responsibilities. (Within the Executive Branch of the Government of the United States, these positions usually carry the 0110 job series.)
 - ❑ Research Analyst positions in private corporations that involve substantive research and analysis of United States export markets (i.e. consulting companies, banks, brokerage houses, and multinational corporations).
 - ❑ International Sales and Marketing positions that involve substantive responsibility for moving product to United States export markets.

Applicants do not qualify on the basis of unpaid experience, academic achievement, language skill, or pedagogic experience alone. The Commercial Service also considers imports into the United States a “domestic” affair. Such experience usually is not credited as directly relevant.

Q. Do you hire foreign nationals?

- A. In country, the Commercial Service hires duly authorized individuals to work in Commercial Affairs as either Foreign Service Nationals or Local Resident Hires. "Duly authorized individuals" are persons authorized to work in the country in question. Contact the Commercial Officer at the nearest United States Embassy for more information on eligibility requirements and current vacancy announcements.

Q. Do I have to speak a language?

- A. To qualify to bid on language designated vacancies, limited non-career candidates (non-tenure track) are required to submit language proficiencies. The ability to speak one or more foreign languages is not among the core competencies of a Foreign Service Officer; and the Commercial Service is able to train career and career candidate officers (tenured and tenure-track, respectively).

Q. Do you hire Interns?

- A. The Overseas Work-Study Internship Program is developed in accordance with the authority of Section 301 of the Civil Service Reform Act of 1978 (5 U.S.C. §3111), Chapter 7 of the Federal Personnel Manual, and Department of Commerce specific guidelines on voluntary and uncompensated service implemented in DAO 202-311.

The purpose of the program is to provide college or university juniors, seniors, and graduate students of Economics, Business Administration and related fields with "hands-on" experience working in the Commercial Section of a U.S. Embassy. The program is uncompensated and designed to encourage students to consider careers in the commercial field. Internships in the Work-Study Program are considered adjunct to an applicant's education. Students must be currently enrolled and taking at least one-half of a full-time academic workload. They must also plan to continue their education immediately upon termination of their internship.

Interns typically serve for one semester or quarter during their academic year, or for a minimum of 10 weeks during the summer, U.S. citizenship and good academic standing are required, along with the successful completion of a security assurance check. For additional information, review the application instructions on the employment page of the www.export.gov/commercialservice.com website.

